

City of Oshawa

Communications Strategy

2018-2021

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Our Strategy

The City of Oshawa's Communications Strategy lays the foundation for a strategic approach to communications. It incorporates the strategies that formed the 2015-2019 Oshawa Strategic Plan. Additionally, insights and discoveries were gathered through an extensive consultation process involving Members of Council, City employees, the public and community stakeholders, which helped shape the Communications Strategy.

The Communications Strategy reflects Council's vision and mission and will be a living document, updated to reflect evolving strategic priorities and the ongoing transformation of our community.

Our Focus, Our Future

Community Vision: what our community aspires to be

Oshawa – a prosperous, collaborative, vibrant, inclusive and green city where people and businesses are proud to live, work, learn and play

Corporate Mission: a statement of purpose or direction

Dedicated to serving our community

The Communications Strategy will provide a mandate for staff to continue to build relationships with our community through strategic and relevant communications.

It will guide the focus of our communications – from the words we choose and the tone and voice we use – in support of our commitment to delivering exceptional service to our community.

Discovery

This Strategy, and its goals and messages, were developed through input from:

- **An in-depth review and analysis of existing communications strategies, policies and materials by an external consultant.**
This helped to inform an understanding of current communications and engagement. Beyond “materials”, this effort also included an audit of the corporate (oshawa.ca) and community engagement websites (connectoshawa.ca), and a high-level review of social media channels.
- **Interviews with municipal communicators from five Ontario cities of a comparable size/make-up to the City of Oshawa: City of Brantford, City of Burlington, City of Guelph, Town of Richmond Hill and City of Sudbury.**
An external consultant explored their current communications department staffing and operations, strategic priorities, centralized versus decentralized structure, media management, sub-brands and departmental support.
- **18 one-on-one interviews on-site at City Hall were completed by an external consultant. Participants included directors, senior-level managers and the Corporate Leadership Team.**
Questions explored the current state of communications at the City, recommended strategies to move forward, preferred communication tools and tactics, and engaging our community’s “hard-to-reach” corners.
- **Three focus groups on-site at City Hall by an external consultant. Each session engaged a unique key audience group: internal (staff), Council (and Corporate Leadership Team) and community partners (employed in a communications role).**
Questions explored the current state of communications at the City, recommended strategies moving forward, preferred communication tools and tactics, and engaging the “hard-to-reach” corners of the community.
- **A public survey, conducted over three weeks online on Connect Oshawa and via paper at various City facilities.**
More than 400 respondents shared their feedback on their satisfaction with current communications, how they currently receive information, their preferred method and frequency of communications, their preferred topics and if they needed communication in an alternative format (i.e. language, accessible).

SCOT Analysis

The discovery portion of this Strategy's creation highlighted a number of internal *strengths* and *weaknesses* (although we prefer the term "*challenges*"), as well as external *opportunities* and *threats*. This useful framework will help us to focus on our strengths, minimize our threats and take the greatest possible advantage of opportunities in how we engage with our community.

Strengths

- Innovative, accessible and deliberate community engagement
- Significant growth and success (as community)
- Strong and predominantly positive social media, media and website presences
- Solid, comprehensive and actionable policy documents

Challenges

- Defining role and strategic importance of communications
- Supporting external audience understanding and interest
- Effectively-resourced and positioned communications Branch

Opportunities

- Direct engagement on Connect Oshawa
- Consolidated strategic communication ownership
- Expanded collaboration with external partners
- Internal communication education opportunities (i.e. media interview training)
- eCommunications (website, newsletters, video and digital animation)
- Clear, concise and strategically-layered communications

Threats

- Communication costs (staffing, printed materials, advertising, etc.)
- Public relations issues (known and unknown)
- Technology needs/costs/accessibility
- Lack of absorption (externally) and understanding communication goals/messaging/brand (internally)

Corporate Communications Vision

The above findings helped frame an overarching vision for the City of Oshawa's Corporate Communications Branch:

We guide strategic communications.

We communicate clearly, concisely, openly and proactively.

We ensure opportunity for participation.

We lead and support City staff in their efforts to keep community members informed.

We partner with community leaders to inform and engage the public.

Responsibilities of Corporate Communications

While everyone plays a part in communications, the specific role of the Corporate Communications Branch is to help the City achieve efficient and meaningful communication strategies and tactics. The following describes the core services and responsibilities of the Branch within 10 categories:

Strategic Communications

- Provide integrated and strategic communications that are externally focused and address the needs of internal and external stakeholders.
- Develop and manage Corporate Communications governance documents including manuals, policies and guidelines.

Community Engagement

- Lead community engagement opportunities about City services, programs and initiatives; support City staff in their efforts to keep community members informed and ensure opportunity for all to participate in engagement opportunities.
- Partner with community leaders to inform and engage the public; build and nurture partnerships with community stakeholders and service organizations and identify new opportunities for outreach.
- Celebrate and communicate good news stories of Oshawa (City and community partner good news, community achievements and celebrating municipal government).

Websites

- Manage www.oshawa.ca (corporate) and www.connectoshawa.ca (community engagement) websites.

Social Media

- Manage the City's corporate social media channels, including content and creative on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.
- Provide strategic direction and governance for the City's audience-specific social media accounts.

Media Relations

- Manage media relations including media events, media materials and media monitoring.

Advertising

- Manage advertising, including City Newspaper Page, corporate advertising rates, as well as graphic design support to branches.
- Manage and develop digital advertising that targets identified key stakeholders.

Corporate Identity/ Brands

- Manage corporate identity/ brands.

Promotional Materials

- Develop creative and prepare City department promotional materials including brochures, publications, etc. and digital design including web, video, social media graphics and infographics.

Issues Communications and Public Relations

- Manage issues communication and assist with public relations/governmental communications; proactively monitor City Council Meeting Agendas and media for potential issues.
- Administer the Tribute Communities Centre community suite and City bowl tickets.

Emergency Communications

- Be involved in the Municipal Emergency Plan as a member of the Oshawa Municipal Control Group in the role of Emergency Information Officer and manage the Emergency Media Centre.
- Proactively manage and lead communications for significant incidents (e.g. weather-related events).

Communication Goals

How will we achieve our communications vision? By establishing clear goals to guide communications and their implementation. Rather than Corporate Communications-specific goals, these are organization-wide, and should serve as the foundational basis for all staff that engage with or inform the public:

1. Civic pride and confidence in the City identity is strengthened.

Communications both guide and strengthen the Oshawa Strategic Plan. They will serve to strengthen the City's brand, improving its reputation, building affinity with residents and loyalty to the community.

2. There is greater awareness and understanding of government services and their role in the community.

Staff and external audiences have a clear understanding on what is a regional or municipal service and where to access information, and more broadly, the role of local government in their lives.

3. Increased frequency of audiences engaging with the City to inform effective decision-making.

Audiences are informed and aware of developments and opportunities in the City, and are more likely to support and contribute to their success and encourage others to do the same.

4. Audience receptiveness to communications is increased.

The right information is sent to the correct audiences in the manner that is most likely to produce a favourable response. Targeted communications include all members of the public in all corners of the city.

5. There is greater appreciation and positive impressions of City services and leadership.

Positive and frequent communications lead to increased trust, more positive receipt of information and an increased desire by audiences to engage, lead or consider political service.

6. Partnerships are built as mutually-beneficial and strategic communication channels to niche audiences.

Strong communication channels and partnerships are nurtured that benefit both the City and its partners, as well as the community at large.

Key Messages

Key messages represent the unique values that the City of Oshawa's communication efforts will realize. These key messages should remain strong areas of focus and improvement to help support the City's Community Vision and Corporate Mission.

The City of Oshawa supports a high quality of life, and a prosperous, vibrant and inclusive community. We communicate critical and core service information and place community collaboration and engagement at the heart of our community building.

1. The City of Oshawa supports a high quality of life, and a prosperous, vibrant and inclusive community.

- The City of Oshawa is a resilient and thriving community with a strong sense of pride and civic spirit in our achievements.
- We are driven by a desire to think and act differently, and to change in order to meet the evolving needs of our community.

2. The City of Oshawa communicates critical and core service information to our audiences.

- We deliver clear, concise and informative information on City programs and services.
- We accommodate the varied needs and preferences of our stakeholders by using a blend of traditional and new technology methods to deliver information.

3. The City of Oshawa places community collaboration at the heart of our community building.

- We provide diverse opportunities for community members and other key audiences to engage and contribute to City decisions.
- We ensure strong and proactive interaction with community organizations, associations, businesses and other key partners for effective information exchange.

Value and Results

What benefits will be realized by the City of Oshawa **as a whole** when strategic and focused communications are utilized?

- Strategic goals and their realization are supported.
- Misinformation is corrected or eliminated.
- There is increased understanding of, and trust in, the government.
- Visitors, residents, business and municipal staff are attracted to the city.
- Community pride and resilience are strengthened.
- Community partnerships are strengthened and additional opportunities identified.
- Effectiveness and preparedness in times of crisis is improved.
- A memorable, united and fulfilling brand experience is delivered.
- The Corporate Core Values: Authenticity, Courage and Trust (ACT) are supported.

WHY?

On the following pages, values and results are noted beside each core recommendation.

Strategies

1. Revitalize Branding

A brand is what audiences think of our organization. It guides our internal and community-based decisions. The City brand has been developed through broad, collaborative engagement; there is opportunity to polish it in support of strategic priorities.

a. Remove Tagline

Remove the “Prepare to be Amazed” positioning tagline as it does not encapsulate the City’s current strengths and is not supported by key stakeholders.

b. Create Voice/Tone

Build on the corporate writing style guidelines and establish “personality” through a voice and tone that engages and entices audiences. These should support the current branding – bold and confident, but welcoming, collaborative (“we”) and “charming”. It can be fun and playful, so long as it is also honest and respectful.

c. Engage in Storytelling

Engage in more frequent strategic storytelling that emphasizes the “new Oshawa” and our accomplishments: positive news stories that highlight staff, residents and partners.

d. Implement a Content Strategy

Tailor messages and provide relevant content to support the varied content needs of the City’s various Branches and their services and programs. Communications will provide strategic direction and engage with Branches on content of interest to their audiences and solicit their support in content generation.

WHY?

Public pride and support of the civic identity and the municipal services behind it is increased.

Consistent, clear, accurate and high-quality messaging is promoted that reflects corporate goals and objectives.

2. Build a Resource Toolkit

Even with the introduction of a Strategy, individuals and Branches may choose to continue managing some of their specific communications.

a. Build Templates

Create standard graphic templates and tools for those within Communications and those in other Branches (i.e. poster, flyer, brochure, etc.). This will ensure that communications are readily identifiable as belonging to the “City” and support our overarching visual brand.

b. Provide Communication Primers

Develop a primer to introduce staff and Council to the operations, role and responsibilities of Communications. Content could include lead time for project requests, information required in order to facilitate a request, anticipated turnaround time for design or other tasks, etc.

To further support Communications’ position as a strategic lead for Branches, additional primers can be developed as needed to support evolving staff needs: how to develop social media content, what is Connect Oshawa, etc.

c. Increase Use of Visuals

Copy-heavy communications should be eliminated in favour of visuals that make a more personal connection. Videos and infographics are popular amongst audiences as an effective way to share important information and to engage.

In addition, the City has a YouTube channel, which should be an avenue of future exploration with additional video opportunities. These may include timely program interviews with key City staff/spokespeople, community contest (most beautiful spot in Oshawa), etc.

WHY?

Standardized communications set best practice examples, leading to consistent communications – sharing a common structure, look and voice – that help to reduce confusion or missed information amongst audiences.

Visuals catch attention and help recipients to remember.

3. Restructure Corporate Communications

There is opportunity for Corporate Communications to restructure its delivery model to ensure consistent, comprehensive and long-term strategic communications and support to Branches across the City.

a. Restructure Delivery Model

Replace the current practice of generalized Communications staff with specialist allocations (i.e. each Branch has a specific rep) and/or Communications staff focus on specific communication tool (i.e. media relations assigned to one Communications staff member). This will allow Communications to provide content and discipline experts better positioned to support Branches with long-term strategic guidance.

b. Clarify Roles

As highlighted, communications goals are organization-wide and serve as the foundational basis for all staff that engage with the public. But while everyone at the City of Oshawa plays a part in effective communication, Corporate Communications is staffed by communications experts, who provide strategic and strong leadership in support of organizational priorities.

It is the role of the Corporate Communications Branch to guide efficient and effective communications. We will do this through the development and tactical implementation of this Strategy, drawing on the knowledge and support of City staff.

Additionally, in select Branches there currently exist staff that support specific and unique communications requirements. It is anticipated that these individuals will continue in their roles, in closer collaboration with Corporate Communications, to support the key goals and objectives outlined within this Strategy and corresponding Corporate Communications governance documents including manuals, policies and guidelines.

This is critical to ensure that City communications fully achieve the identified values and results.

WHY?

Messaging is consistent, relevant and supportive of objectives.

Communications delivers increased volume efficiencies, and focused and strategic guidance.

Staff morale, attraction and retention is increased. Staff anticipate and deliver timely and informed responses to the public.

c. Apply Stronger Prioritization

Communications staff should seek to employ more robust project work prioritization. With limited staffing, there is need to allocate resources accordingly to project work that best supports the overall communication and corporate needs:

1. Does this project support the strategic plan?
2. Is the subject matter of critical interest to City stakeholders?
3. Will lower prioritization affect positive outcomes?

This will ensure that Communication resources effectively support City branding/visioning, service delivery and the public's trust/support most effectively.

d. Communicate Communications

Measure, demonstrate and present yearly results to staff and the community on how strategic and effective communications and community engagement initiatives are supporting the efforts of staff and Council, and the Oshawa Strategic Plan. The presentation may include:

- Branch structure (matrix)
- Overview of services (what they do)
- Summary of achievements and impact on annual goals (# of completed projects, # of media releases, # of videos, etc.)
- Connect Oshawa (engagement stats)
- Graphic design (projects examples)
- Four to six case studies of Branch projects (demonstrating strategic planning and guidance)
- Website/social media review and stats

4. Communicate Government Services

There is opportunity for the City to increase trust and understanding of the role of municipal government.

a. Clarify Purpose

Engage with community leaders to define a core purpose statement of government that goes beyond programs and services: Is it care? Quality of life? Support? Guidance? Consistently support via communications – what do program/service deliverables ultimately support?

b. Communicate “Who Does What?”

Foster greater understanding of the Region versus City roles through an information campaign. Distribution can be made via City staff, Connect Oshawa, partners and channels, media, Council and the Region. Deliverables may include:

- Infographic (showing operations/services of each)
- Factsheet (for mailing to households by the City)
- Stories/anecdotes from City Branches
- Video series (i.e. “Snow removal: We do that”, “Historical preservation: We do that”.)

c. Celebrate Municipal Government

Humanize “the City” and build trust by aligning services with staff that deliver them: create a visual campaign that showcases City staff and their effect on the community. From waste collectors to those drafting By-laws, too often City staff have limited opportunity to engage with external audiences on their critical and essential services.

WHY?

A growing and diverse population is made aware of the role of government.

Staff time is more efficiently allocated to inquiries from the public.

Community members and other key stakeholders feel informed about City and Regional services and operations.

5. Implement Grassroots Engagement

There is opportunity for the City to continue advancing their community engagement efforts through bold new outreach.

a. Identify and Engage with Hard-to-Reach Audiences

Engage with community partners, City staff and other leaders to identify hard-to-reach community niches. Determine their barriers – Mobility? Language? Financial? Identify opportunities to surmount these – telephone survey options, community translation sources, central locations, etc. and integrate these findings into strategic engagement planning.

b. Provide On-site Engagement

Explore a “City Hall on wheels” to connect with community members by being *in* communities. Create an in-person presence, such as a tabletop or roll-up display, to be set up and staffed in key facilities on a rotating basis. The presence should continue to incorporate access to the Connect Oshawa interface (via tablet) to make it easy to engage.

Many City partners and community organizations also host community events. Where time and resources allow, Communications or other Branch staff should attend: this type of personal engagement and interest is critical to partnership building and gives a positive impression to the general public.

c. Utilize Ambassadors

Identify community leaders that have a voice amongst key stakeholders through editorial coverage, blogs or in-community presence. Engage with, and provide key messaging to their voices to ensure that when they speak of the City, it is in an informed and on-message way.

Implement a community ambassador program that enlists students and staff to engage with the community directly at summer events, in recreation and park spaces, and even door to door. Probe specific themes to support City or specific Branch objectives (i.e. subscribe to City news, take our Connect Oshawa survey, etc.).

WHY?

Audiences that are informed and aware are more likely to support and contribute and encourage others to do the same.

Public input drives future planning for programs and initiatives.

Organizational goals are achieved through greater engagement and corresponding results.

d. Create Organized Ward Events

Connect with community members – and address specific geographical issues – by being in a community. Develop a 15 to 20-minute presentation that contains key City messaging as identified, followed by an area for specific ward customization as needs arise. Organize rotating events (by Ward) with associated Councillors.

6. Support a Richer Digital Presence

Interest in online communications is high and will continue to grow. The City should actively pursue new and innovative ways to reach stakeholders virtually.

a. Communicate in Layers

Allow audiences to control their communications and engagement by presenting it in layers: begin with a Facebook post/media release that directs readers to an online webpage backgrounder that contains links to supporting reports/studies. This eliminates the possibility of oversharing or assuming audiences don't want information, and allows them to access or engage as individual preferences direct.

b. Support and Recast Social Media Presence

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram should be maintained as the more established and long-term social media options.

Rethink the use of social media to be less “just another tool” with which to push out static information. Instead, regard social media strictly as a way to dialogue with audiences – within the forum. Content should push users to respond and provide opportunity for the City to engage visibly. This can include video and animation, guest community contributions, a hosted chat, etc.

Communications should remain the centralized manager for the content creation, monitoring and evaluation of these tools, except for specific instances where separate, trained administrators are better able to monitor and respond more effectively to a specific Branch's need. In all cases, monitoring and posting should be assigned only to those who have received training and demonstrate an understanding of strategic communications and corporate goals.

WHY?

New technology, when used alongside traditional tactics, ensures greater and easier access, and broader, more economical delivery.

Digital communication supports strong tracking and measurement.

c. Maintain eNews

Continue to provide a consistently reliable eNewsletter. There is significant potential to enjoy an increased subscriber base through a revitalized and more heavily-promoted eNewsletter. Employ prominent placement on the website homepage and advertising in City communications (i.e. email footer graphic). This tool should continue to provide 3-5 highlights of City news and updates, good news stories, feature articles that reflect the City's strategic goals, upcoming events, fun facts/figures and "have your say" survey links.

Consideration should be given to expanding subscription options in key circumstances. For example, when the new Ward system is implemented, there may be opportunity for monthly eNewsletter specific to each Ward, or if key developments/planning projects will have significant public interest (i.e. new development).

d. Maintain Quality of Website

The newly-redesigned website is a clean, well-organized and intuitive site. It offers a blend of high-level information with news and highlights that are updated regularly. Continue to enhance it as a main external communication vehicle with heavier direction to its URL on communications as the first location for information or clarification.

e. Use Video Organically

Make capturing video, or communicating important information via video, a day-to-day "organic" aspect of providing information. Video doesn't need to always be storyboarded, professionally shot and edited. If there's a road closure, staff can capture a clip using a smart phone for a quick "what's up" piece. Conduct "public on the street" polls about a particular issue, etc.

7. Create Good News Platforms

We should not be afraid to seek and promote stories that demonstrate our success in delivering services to our audiences. This serves to promote all that we do *as well* as our achievements.

a. Promote Good News

Identify and promote positive stories to balance generally hard-news coverage in media. Key to this will be ensuring that stories strongly and clearly demonstrate a value: why does a particular story matter to the public? Without broader value, it is anticipated that community pick-up, and positive public impressions, will be negligible.

Areas of current interest to our public are services and community information (i.e. By-laws, etc.) and not soft stories (i.e. recipes, etc.). Brainstorm a list of stories and push out to media and on social media – look at doing at least one story/release per month. These should look to highlight positive achievements and successes made by the City, its staff and its community members.

b. Solicit Good News Stories

Maintain and proactively promote the Legends Program: recognizing those that delivering excellence, above-and-beyond action, etc. in support of the city. Engage the community seasonally through this nomination and award program; encourage on-site engagement (see page 18).

c. Expand City News

Maintain the “City News” page in local newspaper media. Given strong reliance on traditional print this will serve as a top information source for stakeholders. It should contain informational snapshots and notices *as well* as broader good news stories and community success promotion. Post the “City News” page on Twitter and Facebook to further reach the community.

Advertising is not considered a high-value approach and should be only one of many communications tactics to support a need.

WHY?

The City’s image – both within the community and without – is positively boosted.

Staff and the community are recognized, lauded and engaged.

d. Our Oshawa

Our Oshawa should be maintained. This publication is an excellent signature piece for the City that can be broken up and catalogued for wider promotion via other channels (i.e. social media).

8. Formalize Partnership Approach

Make community and municipal outreach a core component to increase collaborative opportunities that will ensure more robust, comprehensive communications.

a. Engage Public/Grassroots Partners

Identify and engage with professional community organizations/associations. In some cases, these organizations are more approachable (less intimidating) sources for those harder-to-reach sections of the community (i.e. marginalized, multicultural, etc.). Readily positioned to engage with their members, it has been determined that there is already an appetite for partnership with the City.

b. Customize Messaging

Explore unique communication arrangements with public/grassroots partners to provide their stakeholders with timely, useful information that is relevant to them. Create core message(s) that will resonate and engage the partner's target audiences.

c. Create Outreach Communication Partnership

Set one-on-one meetings with 8-10 key partners to develop a formal communication program (and personal rapport). These meetings do not have to be marathon strategy sessions, but a phone call or quick coffee to update, identify opportunities and measure/evaluate previous communication collaboration efforts.

WHY?

Stronger partnerships support effective community collaboration, and greater opportunities, which benefits both the City and partners, and the community at large.

Partner channels provide access to established and no-cost networks.

9. Public Relations

Communications will strive to more effectively and consistently share City information and messaging with traditional media and build upon these relationships.

a. Update Definition of “Media”

Define “bigger” and broader media relations outside of traditional print/radio such as community groups, multicultural groups, community bloggers, influencers, etc.

b. Develop Closer Professional Relationships

Maintain an informal one-on-one communication relationship with local media (i.e. calling to provide information or to follow-up on articles, etc.)

c. Promote Good News

Proactively identify and promote community examples and stories that may help to balance “negative” coverage (see page 22).

d. Support Intergovernmental Relations

Provide Members of Council with appropriate key messages for City initiatives and issues. Coordinate required communications with various levels of government, partners and agencies.

WHY?

Traditional media plays a strong role in Oshawa – many community members rely on, and trust, these sources.

Generally, coverage is fair, and there is potential to create more positive opportunities through stronger relationships with the media.

10. Issues Management

Part of Communications' role is to identify, anticipate and proactively address issues of importance to community members, in collaboration with specific City Branches. Although this is already done to some extent by Branches via yearly planning, concerns can arise that are not foreseen.

Communications will centralize the handling of crisis/issues using its established internal and external channels (i.e. website, newsletter, social media, etc.). Although traditional media will play a role in informing the public, stories and issues can be better managed, and effective and timely responses provided, through use of the City's resources.

WHY?

Anticipating challenges before they become problems allow the necessary steps to be taken to garner support, prepare audiences, identify potential questions and ensure preparedness.

Conclusion

This Communications Strategy takes steps to realign and revitalize the City's communications efforts. It begins with a commitment from all levels of staff and the necessary focus to realize results in today's complex communications environment.

The City of Oshawa serves a widespread and large geographic catchment area with varied communication needs from diverse audiences: efforts must be ample, but strategic, in order to reach them effectively. This Strategy tackles these challenges at every level, leveraging opportunities to position the City as a forward-thinking, open and connected organization.

Overseen by the dedicated Communications Branch, this Strategy is the first step, setting the stage for a carefully-implemented and monitored tactical strategy. Its ongoing success will be supported by the knowledge and enthusiasm of the City's Branches and staff.

This three-year Strategy will allow Corporate Communications and the City of Oshawa to enjoy continued and expanded success in effective communication and community engagement, which is at the heart of this Strategy.

It is with pleasure that we present this Communications Strategy to the City of Oshawa. We've had opportunity to speak with City directors, managers and the CLT, as well as staff, Council and community partners. We've visited your municipal offices, dug into your community reports and lived on your website – we've been a small part of the huge network of City staff and partners that deliver exceptional services to the proud community members of Oshawa. We were, and continue to be, very proud to have been selected to lead this important work.

Prepared by

